

Comprehensive Prayer

<i>Text</i>	Ephesians 6:18
<i>Readings</i>	Ephesians 6:10-20
<i>Theme</i>	We must persevere in all kinds of prayer in the Spirit in this spiritual warfare.
<i>Purpose</i>	To urge us to persevere in prayer at all times and for all believers.

Congregation,

All through world history there has been a lot of fighting going on. The most recent conflict is that going on in Afghanistan. One of the most important aspects of war is to have good lines of communication. That is much easier today with modern technology. Soldiers on the field can communicate easily and quickly with their commanding officers.

The lack of good communication was one of the great difficulties in fighting a war in times past. In past centuries it was very difficult to communicate with another part of the army and this often resulted in a great deal of confusion. Wars were won or lost on the effectiveness of communication. This is true for the Christian too.

In Ephesians 6 the Apostle Paul describes the Christian life as a battle, a warfare, and a conflict. We are engaged in a battle against spiritual forces of evil. He describes the armour we must wear: The belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit. All of these are important for defence and offence in battle.

Having mentioned all of these the Apostle then mentions prayer. Prayer is our means of communication with our commanding officer. All the armour in the world isn't going to help us unless we are in constant contact with the Lord our God. If we don't pray we will lose the battle. If we neglect prayer the enemy will be able to isolate us from our commander and then defeat us. Prayer is a vital part of this spiritual battle. It is an essential part of our life and experience as a believer.

You cannot be a Christian without prayer.

You cannot be an effective and useful Christian without much prayer.

This is a message all of us need to hear and consider. Every one of us needs to be encouraged to pray. All of us, I'm sure, find it difficult to persevere in prayer. This is a weak area for many of us and all of us need encouragement and motivation, guidance and help.

There are four "alls" in this verse. They are clearer in the NASB than in the NIV.

Pray with *all prayer*; at *all times*; with *all perseverance*, for *all the saints*.

1. With all prayer. This is how the Greek literally reads; “with all prayer.”

The NIV gives us the sense of it by saying, “with all kinds of prayer.”

The word for prayer here is a general word for any kind of prayer. And there are various prayers you can pray.

These are illustrated for us in **the Lord’s Prayer** which begins with acknowledging who God is: “Our Father in heaven.”

We then express petitions for specific needs that relate to God: “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done.”

Then we pray for our own needs: “Give us this day our daily bread.”

We confess our sins: “Forgives us our sins.”

We pray for spiritual strength: “And lead us not into temptation.”

One helpful method of prayer is go through the Lord’s Prayer reflecting on these various phrases and using them as the basis for prayer. (cf. No 431 in the Psalter Hymnal).

Someone has summarised the various types of prayers using the word **ACTS**: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication.

‘Supplication’ means requests – the other word Paul uses in this verse. Making requests is one aspect of prayer.

This ACTS outline is a useful means of directing our prayers. You can use something like this as a guide for prayer to help keep your mind focused. As you think about this it is often helpful to write something down. Make a list of things to pray for. Or write out a prayer to help guide your mind and focus your thinking.

Then there are prayers that are **personal**, private and secret between you and the Lord where you pray for specific matters; and there are prayers that are **corporate**, as when we pray in public worship – where we pray for more general matters relating to the whole church and the needs of God’s people.

There are also prayers we pray out loud and those we pray in our minds.

And there are prayers that are ordered and systematic and carefully structured and those that are spontaneous and unstructured.

There is a place for all these different kinds of prayer and all of us need to be making use of all of them at different times. Pray with all kinds of prayers.

2. Secondly, pray at all times (the NIV reads, “On all occasions”).

One result of the terrorist attacks in America is that many more people are going to church. They go there to hear God's word and to pray. Times of **distress and trial** often drive us to pray. They remind us that we cannot make it on our own. We need outside help. We need divine help – God's help. By ourselves we are weak and helpless and we can't hold our own even for a moment.

God may send you trouble and trial as a reminder that you need to pray. Be sure you take note of that reminder.

But let's also pray when **times are good**. It is easy to be complacent when things are going well, to take it for granted and to forget about God. But we should be thankful when things go well. So pray in adversity and in prosperity.

We also need to pray both regularly and spontaneously.

Prayer should be **regular**. Don't wait for an inspiration. Don't leave it until you feel close to God. Prayer is a discipline and it must become a habit. Guard against it being a *mere* habit where we repeat the same phrases without even thinking about them. But there should be set times of prayer: In the morning and evening, before you read the Bible and before meals. You don't have to pray at length each time but you should be regular. Make a habit of prayer.

But we also need to be **spontaneous** in prayer. Be aware of God. Remember that he is with you – always. Talk to him. Speak with him, wherever you are and in whatever you are doing. You can interrupt anything you are doing to pray – to ask for help, to confess a sin, to praise God, to express thanks. The writer of Hebrews urges us to "approach the throne of grace with confidence that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need". (Hebrews 4:16).

3. Thirdly, PRAY WITH ALL PERSEVERANCE.

The NIV has; "be alert and always keep on praying."

All of us need this exhortation because it is not easy to pray. It takes a lot of discipline to set aside time to pray. We have a lot to do and we feel we don't have time to pray. And when we do try we find that our minds wander and we are easily distracted and we run out of things to say.

The Apostle Paul must have experienced the same things. This is why he urges us to "**be alert**". A soldier in battle must always be alert or he will be killed. The enemy will catch him unawares, off his guard, complacent and relaxed. As soldiers in the army of God we also need to "be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8).

This is where the disciples failed their Lord in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus had said to them; “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation” (Mark 14:38). But when he came back from praying he found all of them fast asleep.

Are you like that? Dozing off when you should be praying? Off guard when you should be alert to temptation?

“Be alert and always keep on praying.”

This raises the connection between **the Christian armour and prayer**.

Prayer is not so much a piece of armour but it is a weapon in spiritual warfare.

It is such a vital weapon that if you neglect it you will lose the battle. You will lose connection with the commanding Head and Captain of the army. You will lose touch with your supply lines. To be properly equipped for battle you must keep on praying.

One of the church’s battle hymns has captured this connection with the words; “Put on the gospel armour, each piece put on with prayer.” Protect your armour with prayer.

At this point we should also consider that little phrase, “Pray **in the Spirit**”.

Our normal and usual pattern of prayer ought to be to the Father, through the Son, with the help of the Holy Spirit.

When we pray “in the Spirit” we are praying with his help. Paul wrote about this in Romans 8:26, “In the same way the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.” The Spirit directs our prayers, prompts us, guides us and stimulates our mind and thoughts. He gives us liberty and freedom in prayer. Without his assistance prayer would be impossible.

But that is true of the entire life of the Christian; all of it is impossible without the indwelling and filling of God’s Spirit. This is why the NT letters urge us to *live* by the Spirit, *walk* by the Spirit, *be filled* with the Spirit, show the *fruit* of the Spirit and use the *gifts* of the Spirit. So too we are to *pray* “in the Spirit” – with his help.

Praying in the Spirit will keep us from mechanical prayer that is merely a vain repetition. It will keep us from cold and formal prayers where we merely go through the motions. Prayer is not just repeating words; it is a direct and meaningful conversation with God. Pray that the Holy Spirit will help you to do that.

Pray with *all prayer*; at *all times*; with *all perseverance*, and finally:

4. For all the saints.

Too often our prayers are self-centred, focused on our own needs and concerns. Here Paul gives us a wider focus – all the saints.

We know that he did this. In every letter he wrote he assured those believers that he was praying for them. He often mentioned people by name, sometimes whole lists of individual people that he remembered in prayer.

Do you do that? Are you praying for other people? Often we assure someone that we will pray for them but then we break our word because we promptly forget about them! The way to get around that is to write up a list of people to pray for and go through that systematically. Keep it in your Bible or by your desk or your bed and use it each day.

Notice that he says, “keep on praying for *all* the saints.” Not just some of them. Not just your friends. Not just the people you like. Not just your family members. Pray for all of these people but pray wider than this.

Pray for your enemies. Jesus told us to do that. Pray for those you don’t get on with so well, those who irritate you, those you get annoyed and frustrated with. Pray for them.

Pray for other members of the church. The Church Directory can be a great help to be systematic about this.

Pray especially for those in special need: those going through sickness, trial or temptation. Those who are sad, grieving and lonely.

Calvin urges us out of our coldness when he writes; “reflect [on] how many of our brethren are worn out by varied and heavy afflictions, are weighed down by deep anxiety, or are reduced to the worst distress. If we are not roused out of our lethargy, we must have hearts of stone.” (Commentary on Ephesians 6:18).

Pray for believers throughout the world, especially the persecuted church. It is fitting that the Apostle Paul should close this letter with this exhortation because Ephesians is a letter about the church. Not only the local church but the church of Christ throughout the world. The church universal. The church in all places and nations. Pray for the entire church community throughout the world.

As you do that pray for the spread of the gospel.

Pray specifically for those you know and work with and study with who do not believe.

Pray for the work of evangelism and mission. Pray that unbelievers might be saved; that those living in darkness may enter the light; that those who are bound might be set free. Paul went on in vs 19-20 to ask them to pray for him in this regard`...

Pray for preachers of the gospel and pastors and evangelists and for missionaries. Pray for your pastor – he needs your prayers as did the Apostle Paul.

Pray that through the work of every one of us the good news about Jesus may go through the world and that the Kingdom of Christ may advance and that he may return soon.

This is a spiritual battle.

You are fighting for the Lord Jesus, in his army.

You need his armour. You need to put it on with prayer.

You need to maintain a constant line of communication with the Commander of the army. You must pray “in the Spirit, on all occasions, with all kinds of prayers and requests...Be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.”

Amen.